

RESULTS OF THE 2003 PARENT SURVEY

May 20, 2004



Background

The impact of parental involvement on a child's academic success has long been studied by educators and social scientists. Even with methodological limitations in separating the effect of parental involvement from other social and educational variables, the cumulative research and knowledge have documented the positive impact of parental involvement on a child's long-term academic success, on the child's attitude toward and behavior in school, and on the child's self-esteem. This relationship exists regardless of the parent's education level and regardless of the child's enrollment in elementary, middle or high school. (ERIC, Northwest Regional Education Laboratory, Epstein, MiddleWeb)

Consequently, promoting the importance of parental involvement in public education is a national education priority. The federal laws Goals 2000: Educate America Act and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 emphasize the importance of building parents' capacity for strong parental involvement. Section 1118 of No Child Left Behind requires an annual evaluation of the content and effectiveness of the parental involvement policy in improving the academic quality of schools.

The state of South Carolina has also recognized the importance of parental involvement in the education and academic success of children. In 1998 the Education Accountability Act (EAA) was enacted followed in 2000 by the Parental Involvement in Their Children's Education Act. Section 59-181-900 of the EAA requires that the annual report card include "evaluations of the school by parents, teachers, and students" as performance indicators to evaluate public schools. In addition the Parental Involvement in Their Children's Education Act requires the Education Oversight Committee to "survey parents to determine if state and local efforts are effective in increasing parental involvement." The tool that has been adopted by the Education Oversight Committee and administered by the Department of Education to survey parents to determine their perception of their child's school and the effectiveness of parental involvement programs is the annual parent survey.

During the spring of 2002 and again in 2003, the Department of Education, in cooperation with the Education Oversight Committee, asked all public school principals to distribute the annual parent survey to the parents or guardians of children in grades five, eight, and eleven, or in the highest grade in their school which included primary schools. The manner of distribution and collection of the surveys was left to the discretion of the school district and/or school. All completed surveys were returned by the schools to the Department of Education. Results were tabulated with the scores of three questions relating to the schools' overall learning environment, home-school relations, and social and physical environment printed on the 2002 and 2003 report cards. The Department of Education provided each school's results of the parent survey to the school district office.

Overview of 2002 Parent Survey Results:

The 2002 parent survey revealed the following perceptions of public schools and effectiveness of parental involvement efforts. The data showed that parents were overwhelmingly satisfied with the learning environment at their child's school (80.61%) and with the social and physical environment at their child's school (77.94%). However, just over two-thirds (68.59%) were satisfied with home-school relations. The overall perceptions were more positive for parents of elementary students than that of middle and high school parents. Finally, the data revealed that parents whose children attend schools having a higher absolute performance rating had higher overall satisfaction levels with their child's school.

Regarding the effectiveness of parental involvement programs, almost one-third of the parents who responded to the survey felt that they were not involved in school changes, were not told how to help their child learn, and were not included in the decision-making process at the school site. Another 35.02% of the respondents indicated they did not volunteer at their child's school, citing lack of timely information on how to become involved.

The following report is an analysis of the results of the 2003 parent survey results. Because the administration of and format of the survey were not changed, the EOC reviewed the data with the objective of answering the following questions regarding parental involvement and parental perceptions of schools:

1. Compared to 2002, did more or fewer parents respond to the survey? Why or why not? Were the demographic characteristics of the respondents similar across the two years?
2. Compared to last year, generally, are parents more or less satisfied with their child's school learning environment, home-school relations, and school/physical environment? If there are changes, can these changes be attributed to anything based on the data?
3. Regarding parental involvement, are parents more involved in their child's school? If not, what obstacles are preventing them? Are these the same obstacles as reported last year?

Following is an analysis of the data provided by the 2003 parent survey. Questions 1 through 46 of the survey were designed to elicit information on parental perceptions and parental involvement patterns. The remaining questions, which were optional, asked for information on the socioeconomic characteristics and ethnicity of the respondent.

Response

Compared to 2002, the number of parent surveys returned in 2003 increased by 15.9%. For comparison purposes, during the 2002-03 school year the 135-day average daily membership in grades 5th, 8th, and 11th increased by only 2% over the prior school year. In 2003 an additional one of out every six parents completed and returned the survey. This significant increase in the response rate should provide more overall information by which schools, school districts, teachers, parents and School Improvement Councils can identify areas of strengths and weaknesses and define opportunities to improve parental involvement in schools.

The increase in the response rate may be attributed to several variables. First, because schools are responsible for disseminating and collecting the surveys, principals were likely more successful in their efforts at improving the response rate. Another explanation may be greater familiarity with the survey by parents and educators. Still another explanation may be greater acceptance of the usefulness of the survey by educators and parents.

	2003	2002
135-Day Average Daily Membership of 5th, 8th, and 11th Grades	148,427	144,550
Total Parent Surveys Returned:	64,732	55,864
One or Fewer Questions not Answered	84.59%	86.44%
Two or Fewer Questions not Answered	89.14%	91.65%

A review of the 2003 respondents reveals the following:

- For the second consecutive year, parents who completed the survey overwhelmingly indicated that they had a child in an elementary school. Approximately, 43.19% of the respondents were parents of elementary school students. There was a decrease in the percentage of all respondents who indicated that they had a child in middle school and a slight increase in the percentage of parents who indicated that they had a child in high school.

	2003	2002
Child in Elementary School	43.19%	44.37%
Child in Middle School	37.06%	38.84%
Child in High School	15.97%	14.87%
No response or invalid response	3.78%	1.92%

- Like the results of 2002, the respondents were six times more likely to be women than men.
- As in the 2002 survey, the majority, 56.60% of all respondents in 2003 were of white ethnicity as compared to 57.54% in 2002.
- Regarding the educational attainment of the respondents, the parents who responded to the survey reported an educational achievement level higher than that of the general public in South Carolina. This characteristic is consistent with the prior year's survey respondents.

Question:	2003 Parent Survey Respondents	Educational Attainment for Persons 18 Years and Over in South Carolina *
What is the highest level of education you have completed?		
Attended Elementary/High School	15.00%	30.5%
Completed High School/GED	25.48%	30.3%
Associate Degree	8.08%	6.0%
Attended College	21.26%	18.2%
College Degree	15.47%	10.4%
Postgraduate Study	8.48%	4.6%
No or Multiple Response	6.23%	---

* Source: South Carolina Statistical Abstract 2001-2002,
<http://www.ors2.state.sc.us/abstract/chapter7/ed3.html>

- The parents who responded to the survey reported having household incomes which are representative of the state. 48.54% of the parents had total household incomes in excess of \$35,000 which is the same percentage as reported in 2002. For comparison purposes, according to the South Carolina Statistical Abstract for 2001-02, the median household income in South Carolina in 1991 was \$37,082. Approximately, 60% of the households in South Carolina had incomes in excess of \$30,000.
- When asked about their child's academic success, 49.65%, as compared to 49.45% in 2002, of the parents who completed the survey reported that their child received mostly A's and B's on his or her last report card. Only 3.05% of the parents reported that their child received mostly D's and F's on his or her last report card.

Parent Perceptions

On the annual school report cards, parental responses to three questions are published. These questions were designed to measure parent perception of the learning environment, the home-school relations, and the physical and social environment of their child's school. An analysis of the responses to these questions and a comparison of the responses to the 2002 survey follow:

Learning Environment

Question 5: I am satisfied with the learning environment at my child's school.

80.13% of all respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement while 15.53% of all respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. Breaking down the responses across selected variables revealed the following:

Parents of/with:	Agree or Strongly Agree	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
White Ethnicity	81.49%	15.43%
Non-White Ethnicity	79.93%	15.35%
Child in Elementary School	85.69%	11.11%
Child in Middle School	76.11%	19.39%
Child in High School	76.38%	18.81%
Child Making A's or B's	82.85%	13.77%
Child Making C's or Below	69.58%	24.50%
Family Income Over \$35,000	81.36%	15.68%
Family Income Under \$35,000	80.11%	15.19%
Some College Education	80.54%	16.16%
High School or Less Education	80.87%	14.63%

Clearly, parents of a child in elementary school who made A's or B's had a more favorable perception of their child's learning environment. As compared to the responses from the 2002 parent survey, parent satisfaction with the learning environment at their child's school remained overwhelmingly positive.

Question: I am satisfied with the learning environment at my child's school.	2003 Survey	2002 Survey
Agree or Strongly Agree	80.13%	80.61%
Disagree or Strongly Disagree	15.53%	15.50%

Home-School Relations

Question 16: I am satisfied with home-school relations at my child's school.

66.76% of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement while 18.63% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Breaking down the responses across selected variables revealed the following:

Parents of/with:	Agree or Strongly Agree	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
White Ethnicity	68.55%	19.17%
Non-White Ethnicity	65.77%	17.85%
Child in Elementary School	74.19%	13.21%
Child in Middle School	61.75%	22.85%
Child in High School	59.82%	24.20%
Child Making A's or B's	69.16%	17.23%
Child Making C's or Below	57.02%	26.54%
Family Income over \$35,000	69.11%	18.96%
Family Income under \$35,000	65.94%	18.22%
Some College Education	68.26%	19.49%
High School or Less Education	66.02%	17.76%

Based on the results of the survey, the percentage of parents who were satisfied with home-school relations declined across grade levels. The highest level of satisfaction with home school relations occurred in elementary school with the lowest in high school. Similarly, parents whose children made A's or B's had higher satisfaction levels than parents whose children make C's or below. Education attainment of parents had little impact on satisfaction levels.

In comparing the overall parent perception of home-school relations with the 2002 survey results, the satisfaction level declined. The percentage of parents who indicated their positive satisfaction with home-school relations declined from 68.59% to 66.76% while the negative perception of home-school relations remained relatively unchanged. It should be noted that the perceptions were consistent and independent of race, education achievement, and income.

Question:	2003 Survey	2002 Survey
I am satisfied with home-school relations at my child's school.		
Agree or Strongly Agree	66.76%	68.59%
Disagree or Strongly Disagree	18.63%	18.76%

Social and Physical Environment

Question 21: I am satisfied with the social and physical environment at my child's school.

77.25% of all respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement while 16.20% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Breaking down the responses across selected variables revealed the following:

Parents of/with:	Agree or Strongly Agree	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
White Ethnicity	79.17%	16.03%
Non-White Ethnicity	76.25%	16.32%
Child in Elementary School	85.04%	10.39%
Child in Middle School	71.96%	20.91%
Child in High School	70.53%	21.67%
Child Making A's or B's	79.25%	15.38%
Child Making C's or Below	70.15%	21.03%
Family Income Over \$35,000	79.48%	15.99%
Family Income Under \$35,000	76.61%	15.92%
Some College Education	78.33%	16.82%
High School or Less Education	77.12%	15.48%

Overwhelmingly, parents of a child in elementary school were more satisfied with the social and physical environment of their child's school. Again, the satisfaction level declined across grade levels. And, when comparing the responses to the 2002 survey results, parental satisfaction with the social and physical environment at their child's school remained quite positive and unchanged.

Question: I am satisfied with the social and physical environment at my child's school.	2003 Survey	2002 Survey
Agree or Strongly Agree	77.25%	77.94%
Disagree or Strongly Disagree	16.20%	16.07%

On a statewide basis, parent perceptions of their child's learning environment, of home-school relations at their child's school, and of the social and physical environment of their child's school were generally positive. However, only two-thirds of all parents who responded to the survey were satisfied with home-school relations. And, of those parents whose children made C's or below on their most recent report card, one-fourth were not satisfied with home-school relations or with the learning environment at their child's school.

The data also consistently revealed that twice as many parents of middle and high school students had negative perceptions of all three indicators, as compared to parents of elementary students. The socioeconomic status and educational background of parents did not seem to affect parent perceptions. These findings are consistent with those of the 2002 annual parent survey.

The following analysis seeks to determine if there are any differences in parental perceptions across schools based on the absolute performance rating of their child's school and what, if any, changes occurred since 2002. Again, questions 5, 16, and 21 are analyzed.

Question 5: I am satisfied with the learning environment at my child's school.

Parents whose child attends a school rated:	Agree or Strongly Agree		Disagree or Strongly Disagree	
	2003	2002	2003	2002
Excellent	87.05%	87.81%	10.10%	9.73%
Good	82.56%	83.06%	13.77%	13.36%
Average	77.51%	78.75%	18.18%	17.13%
Below Average	70.89%	70.55%	23.53%	23.95%
Unsatisfactory	62.88%	65.20%	30.97%	28.41%

The data reveal that in 2003, as compared to 2002, parents of a child in an unsatisfactory school were less positive about their child's learning environment. The change in parent perceptions at all other schools differed by less than 1%. The question raised is what are the reasons for the increased parent dissatisfaction among parents whose child attends an unsatisfactory school. Do increased student-teacher ratios in the classrooms explain the dissatisfaction? Are parents in these schools frustrated by a perceived lack of student academic improvement? These and other possible explanations should be considered when devising statewide efforts to improve parental involvement in schools and to engage parents and the community in addressing academic underachievement in these schools.

Question 16: I am satisfied with home-school relations at my child's school.

Parents whose child attends a school rated:	Agree or Strongly Agree		Disagree or Strongly Disagree	
	<u>2003</u>	<u>2002</u>	<u>2003</u>	<u>2002</u>
Excellent	72.27%	74.65%	15.21%	15.03%
Good	68.57%	70.06%	17.57%	17.85%
Average	64.42%	67.34%	20.64%	19.71%
Below Average	59.98%	63.21%	23.59%	22.28%
Unsatisfactory	56.08%	58.96%	27.90%	26.94%

The data reveal declines among **all** parents in the percentage who agree or strongly agree that they are satisfied with home-school relations. The decline exists at all schools regardless of the school's absolute rating. On the other hand, the percentage of parents who disagree or strongly disagree with the statement is relatively unchanged among these schools.

Question 21: I am satisfied with the social and physical environment at my child's school.

Parents whose child attends a school rated:	Agree or Strongly Agree		Disagree or Strongly Disagree	
	<u>2003</u>	<u>2002</u>	<u>2003</u>	<u>2002</u>
Excellent	85.42%	86.71%	10.56%	9.61%
Good	80.69%	80.71%	13.52%	13.74%
Average	74.08%	76.05%	19.20%	17.42%
Below Average	65.34%	66.42%	26.64%	25.70%
Unsatisfactory	57.37%	60.50%	34.84%	31.31%

The comparison reveals that parents whose child attended an unsatisfactory school were less likely to be satisfied with the social and physical environment at their child's school in 2003 as compared to 2002. In 2003, one out of three parents whose child attended an unsatisfactory school was not satisfied with the social and physical environment of their child's school.

In conclusion, the data from the parent surveys of 2002 and 2003 reveal slight declines among all parents responding when compared to the absolute performance rating of their child's school. However, the greatest declines exist for parents whose child attended an underperforming school. Parents whose child attended an unsatisfactory school were less satisfied with the learning environment, home-school relations and the social and physical environment of

their child's school in 2003. And, approximately one-fourth of all parents in the survey whose child attended either below average or unsatisfactory schools were not satisfied with home-school relations or with the learning environment at their children's school.

Parental Involvement Programs and Initiatives

The second objective of the parent survey is to determine the effectiveness of state and local parental involvement programs as required by the Parental Involvement in Their Children's Education Act. The survey instrument includes individual questions to elicit detailed information on the learning environment, home-school relations, and social and physical environment of the schools. Responses to these questions reveal the strengths and weaknesses of parental involvement initiatives at individual schools. Similarly, aggregation of the data provides state policymakers information on the overall effectiveness of policies and programs in promoting parental involvement. The following analysis again focuses on the learning environment, home-school relations, and the social and physical environment of schools.

Learning Environment: In 2003 parents responded accordingly to the following questions regarding the learning environment of their child's school. Responses to the 2002 survey are also included for comparison purposes:

	Agree or Strongly Agree		Disagree or Strongly Disagree	
LEARNING ENVIRONMENT	2003	2002	2003	2002
My child's teachers give homework that helps my child learn.	88.12%	89.38%	7.73%	7.55%
My child's school has high expectations for student learning.	87.49%	88.40%	7.92%	8.03%
My child's teachers encourage my child to learn.	87.52%	88.83%	7.16%	6.87%
My child's teachers provide extra help when my child needs it.	75.56%	77.42%	15.24%	14.27%

The data is consistent across the two years. Parents overwhelmingly feel that their child's teachers provide the academic assistance necessary to provide a positive learning environment.

Home-School Relations: Based on national research and the results of the 2002 parent survey in South Carolina, home-school relations typically decline as students progress through middle and high school. Many educators and parents contend that this decline is attributed to the growing independence of students and to the fact that students have multiple teachers in the upper grades. Ten statements were included in the parent survey to highlight issues of home-school relations. The responses to these statements were analyzed and the data

reflected in the following table, Table A. Because a greater percentage of parents expressed a negative perception toward home-school relations in 2003 as compared to 2002, the percentage of parents who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the individual statements was analyzed. Furthermore, the data was disaggregated according to the child's school. For comparison purposes, 2002 results are also included.

Table A
Disagree or Strongly Disagree

	Elementary		Middle		High	
	2003	2002	2003	2002	2003	2002
My child's teachers contact me to say good things about my child.	33.54%	31.74%	53.22%	52.50%	56.85%	56.40%
My child's teachers tell me how I can help my child learn.	22.33%	20.26%	41.04%	39.33%	51.12%	51.34%
My child's teachers invite me to visit my child's classrooms during the school day.	27.19%	25.87%	48.06%	47.93%	58.67%	57.41%
My child's school returns my phone calls or e-mails promptly.	11.26%	11.01%	20.54%	20.74%	24.44%	24.64%
My child's school includes me in decision-making.	21.65%	21.48%	34.30%	33.97%	39.99%	40.33%
My child's school gives me information about what my child should be learning in school.	13.94%	13.71%	26.93%	26.86%	32.04%	33.65%
My child's school considers changes based on what parents say.	23.32%	23.55%	34.22%	35.17%	37.78%	39.32%
My child's school schedules activities at times that I can attend.	16.76%	17.18%	21.52%	22.02%	21.40%	22.68%
My child's school treats all students fairly.	17.09%	16.45%	28.58%	29.17%	32.90%	34.62%
My principal at my child's school is available and welcoming.	9.46%	8.98%	14.11%	14.44%	18.40%	18.45%

In summary, parent responses to these ten questions regarding home-school relations were relatively unchanged across grade levels over the two years. It should be pointed out that when comparing responses from 2002 and 2003 the parents responding represent different individuals. However, the data reveal the following:

- Between one-third and one-half of all respondents stated that their child's teachers do not contact them to say good things about their child.
- Almost one-half of all respondents who had a child in middle or high school maintained that their child's teachers did not tell them how to help their child learn.
- As in 2002, only one-third of all respondents who had a child in high school believed that their child's school gave them information about what their child should be learning in school.

Social and Physical Environment: The parent survey includes four statements that describe the social and physical environment of a child's school. The responses to those statements as well as the results from the 2002 survey are below:

SOCIAL & PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	Agree or Strongly Agree		Disagree or Strongly Disagree	
	2003	2002	2003	2002
My child's school is kept neat and clean.	86.90%	86.67%	8.89%	9.61%
My child feels safe at school.	85.68%	85.53%	9.79%	10.73%
My child's teachers care about my child as an individual.	77.01%	76.57%	12.40%	11.79%
Students at my child's school are well behaved.	54.05%	54.69%	29.91%	29.74%

As in 2002, parents are generally very satisfied with their child's social and physical environment. Still, almost one-third of the parents in the survey point to student behavior as an area of concern.

The next analysis deals with the parents' responses to questions regarding specific parental involvement activities and/or parenting activities in

which the respondents participate. It should be emphasized that the results are self-reported. As Table B illustrates, the percentage of parents in 2003 who responded “I do this” to each of the thirteen areas of parental involvement is less than 1% different from the responses to the 2002 parent survey. And, as in 2002, approximately 35% of the respondents when asked about volunteering at school indicated that they don’t volunteer but would like to.

Table B

	Percentage Responding "I do this"	
	2003	2002
Attend open houses or parent-teacher conferences	76.63%	76.99%
Attend student programs or performances	76.17%	77.15%
Volunteer for the school	40.91%	41.49%
Go on trips with my child's school	34.57%	34.44%
Participate in School Improvement Council Meetings	11.99%	12.26%
Participate in Parent-Teacher-Student Organizations	37.81%	38.48%
Participate in school committees	17.47%	17.42%
Attend parent workshops	24.41%	25.45%
Visit my child's classrooms during the school day	35.19%	35.79%
Contact my child's teachers about my child's schoolwork.	71.99%	71.31%
Limit the amount of time my child watches TV, plays, video games, surfs the Internet, etc.	80.80%	81.00%
Make sure my child does his/her homework.	92.63%	92.81%
Help my child with homework when he/she needs it.	91.63%	92.18%

When looking at the obstacles to parental involvement, the survey again showed that parents believe that their work was the most common obstacle to their involvement at their child's school. Again, almost one-third of the respondents also indicated that information on how to become involved either does not get to them or gets to them late. The obstacles are consistent across the two years.

Percentage Replying "True"
2003 **2002**

Lack of transportation reduces my involvement	12.59%	12.61%
Family health problems reduce my involvement.	15.43%	15.46%
Lack of available care for my children or other family members reduces my involvement.	15.27%	15.25%
My work schedule makes it hard for me to be involved.	56.97%	57.91%
The school does not encourage my involvement.	20.10%	19.68%
Information about how to be involved either comes too late or not at all.	29.07%	28.71%
I don't feel like it is appreciated when I try to be involved.	14.24%	13.89%

Parents were also asked several questions about their child's school and its efforts in increasing parental involvement. Consistently, over one-fourth rate their child's school's efforts at parental involvement as only "okay."

**Good or
Very Good**

**Bad or
Very Bad**

Okay

	2003	2002	2003	2002	2003	2002
School's overall friendliness.	70.83%	71.67%	3.57%	3.63%	22.61%	23.07%
School's interest in parents' ideas and opinions.	53.33%	54.60%	9.85%	10.03%	32.70%	32.77%
School's effort to get important information from parents.	58.89%	58.54%	9.34%	10.04%	27.97%	28.82%
The school's efforts to give important information to parents.	64.30%	64.81%	8.10%	8.36%	24.12%	24.61%
How the school is doing overall.	66.56%	67.31%	5.09%	5.33%	24.91%	25.14%

Conclusions and Policy Implications

1. In 2003 there was a significant increase in the number of parents who completed and returned the annual parent survey. The Education Oversight Committee recommends that principals continue to encourage parents to complete the survey and to communicate to parents the importance of the information to be obtained from the survey. Principals and school improvement councils should use the results of the survey to identify strengths and weaknesses in their schools and implement policies to improve parental involvement by all parents.
2. Parents continue to have an overwhelmingly positive perception of the learning environment and social and physical environment of their child's school. Unfortunately, for the second consecutive year, only two-thirds of parents responding to the survey had a favorable view of home-school relations at their child's school. Again, almost one out of five parents had an unfavorable perception of home-school relations at his or her child's school.
3. The responses to individual questions reveal that parent perception of home-school relations remained at essentially the same level of dissatisfaction as reported in 2002 across grade levels. While the parents who completed the survey in 2003 are overall different individuals, these parents have many characteristics in common with those parents who responded to the 2002 survey. As the data reveal respondents in 2002 and in 2003 have children in the same type of schools, have similar socioeconomic characteristics and report the same level of parental involvement in their child's school. In 2002 and 2003, parents expressed their dissatisfaction with the level of communication between them and their child's school at comparable levels. Consequently, from a statewide basis, improvement in home-school relations has not improved over the past two years.
4. In 2003 a significant decline occurred in parent perceptions of their child's school among parents whose child attended an unsatisfactory school and slight declines across all other schools based on the absolute performance rating of the school. For parents whose child attended an unsatisfactory school in the 2002-03 school year, a lower percentage of parents expressed positive perceptions of the learning environment, home-school relations, and social and physical environment of their child's school than reported in 2002.
5. In 2003 parents reported their involvement in school activities and functions at the same level as documented in 2002. For the second year, parents noted that their work schedule was the greatest obstacle to their involvement.

6. The results of the 2003 parent survey will be distributed to the Department of Education for consideration and use in assisting schools and school districts in parental involvement initiatives and programs and in devising statewide parental involvement programs.
7. The EOC will continue to monitor the results of the parent survey. For the 2004 parent survey, the EOC will also consider if parent perceptions and parental involvement patterns vary geographically across the state.

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